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IC 78-2312

MEMORANDUM FOR: [redacted] DD/OPEI  
[redacted] OPBD/PAD

FROM: [redacted] OPEI

SUBJECT: Comments on "Air Force/Army Reconnaissance Force Study"

As requested, I spent an afternoon reviewing the recent (December 1977) joint Air Force-Army study of recce requirements and capabilities in the conventional military defense of central Europe. Since the study is lengthy and not very well organized, and inasmuch as I only spent a few hours going over it, the following remarks should be considered impressions.

Overall, I think it's a good start at trying to structure the horrendous problem of measuring the cost-effectiveness of each of the various and sundry service, national, allied, COMINT, ELINT, and imagery collectors that have some warfighting role to play in defending Europe. The study catalogs and tries to evaluate on a comparative basis no less than 47 such systems. Obviously, a very large amount of work went into gathering vital statistics on these systems and figuring out what each might be used for. Putting all of these data together in one document is in itself an important service.

If, however, the purpose of the study was to provide analysis adequate to support program decisions regarding which systems to acquire, phaseout, improve, or simply retain, I must honestly say that I think it falls far short. This is not to disparage what can only be described as a valiant effort by the study team; rather, the failure to achieve so ambitious a goal attests to the nature of the monster that tactical military intelligence has become through years of more-or-less arbitrary accumulation of collection systems. Unfortunately, the study does seem to have been this ambitious, since the authors somehow manage to arrive at quite explicit program recommendations. The analytic sequence supporting these recommendations is too tortuous for me to follow. To me, the recommendations just seem to pop out.

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Actually, I can only find about fifteen pages of analysis in the entire 134-page main body of the report. The rest of the paper consists of seemingly interminable descriptions of assumptions, limitations, methodological problems, etc., that really belong in appendices. This would, however, tend to crowd the back of the report, since there's already nearly 200 pages of appendices included. The analysis occurs in Chapter IV, described as the "heart of the study", where stated intelligence requirements of military field forces for information on mobile, fixed and air-related targets are correlated on a zone-by-zone basis (zones being distances from the FEBA) with the collection capabilities of existing and planned sensing systems. The correlations are then used to infer shortfalls on the one hand, and redundancies on the other.

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The point is that the analysis in the study is really no more than a system for arranging and amalgamating a lot of highly subjective judgments that have been reached by the study team, with the process not always entirely consistent as the above examples show. Perhaps the problem is simply too jumbled and ambiguous to be able to honestly compare the cost-effectiveness of various sensors in an objective, truly quantitative fashion. However, even if the kind of subjective quasi-quantitative approach is all that can be achieved, a more informative, better discriminating standard than the simple "useful-not useful" judgments used here is needed for summarizing the utility of the various collectors. A point system might serve this purpose. If this approach is taken in further analysis, a computer program would be useful in processing and condensing the data, and perhaps even essential to avoiding the kinds of inconsistencies noted above. (it isn't clear how the study handled this task--you get the impression that they pasted a very large chart on a wall somewhere.)

In summary, I think the study represents a commendable first step in gathering and ordering data and may, if anything, err on this score by presenting too much. As the study itself notes, too much trivial information (which, it is concluded, tactical collectors are forwarding to the military field forces) can not only have a zero value, but a negative one to the extent it clogs channels of communication and inundates recipients. But it also seems to me that a great deal more work is needed in organizing and interpreting this information before any confident conclusions can be reached as to how the various systems rank in cost-effectiveness terms.

As a final note (in an admittedly philosophical vein), I can't help wondering how much of a contribution we can really expect from this hodge-podge conglomeration of tactical collectors if it ever really has to be used. How can we expect a system, so complex and diffuse that it defies analysis, to function effectively under the trauma of a sudden and massive attack? sophistication usually also means fragility, and there seems to me a real danger that the whole tactical intelligence system might simply collapse under that kind of stress. Even if it doesn't, the delays that could arise from trying too hard to fit strike sorties to the best possible targets via an intelligence system that isn't up to the task could seriously undermine the defense by reducing the number of strike sorties that are flown. (I get this vision of a battlefield swarming with lucrative targets, and strike aircraft sitting on an apron somewhere waiting for intelligence to locate and assign one particular target that's ten percent better than all the rest).

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In other words, we may just possibly be trying to "overmanage" our combat resources. If we rely too much on centralized tactical control, and the mechanisms of that control--whether the intelligence collectors, the automated processing facilities, the communications, or whatever--break down or are disabled in war, we could end up worse off than we would have been if more training emphasis had been placed on small unit initiative. A policy of gas-up, fly east, and bomb the first target that you find, or that some ground unit tells you about, would at least assure maximum sortie rates.



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